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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 ABUJA 002234

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

PASS HHS FOR OGHA STEIGER/BHAT  
CDC FOR BLOUNT/JANI/LEDUC/NCOX/ARTHUR  
GENEVA FOR WHO  
USDA/APHIS/US/NCIE FOR BURLESON  
USDA/FSIS FOR RHARRIES  
USDA/FAS/CMP/DLP FOR M FRANCOM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [AMED](#) [CASC](#) [EAID](#) [XX](#) [NI](#) [WHO](#) [FAO](#) [AVIANFLU](#)  
SUBJECT: NIGERIA'S PLAN ON AVIAN FLU STILL IN INITIAL STAGE

REF A: State 206992 B: State 206588

1. (SBU) Summary. In February 2004, Nigeria held a consultative forum on Avian Influenza (AI), and Nigerian President Obasanjo is "very aware" of the threat AI poses to Nigeria. The Ministry of Health (MOH), in late October 2005 issued the third draft of the government's AI Position Paper. On November 14th, 2005, the MOH inaugurated the Health Sector Technical and expert Committee on AI. The expected outcome of the Committee is a Nigeria AI Preparedness and Response Plan. Difficulties the MOH faces include political will, a lack of resources, Nigeria's poor health and communications networks, and the country's loose control over its borders. For these reasons the effects of an AI outbreak in Nigeria could be catastrophic. End summary.

2. (U) Nigeria has discussed since February 2004 making preparations against AI. Nigerian President Obasanjo, who owns a large chicken farm, is "very aware" of the threat AI poses to Nigeria, and senior policymakers in Nigeria seem to be aware of AI's potential implications, according to USAID Nigeria. In February 2004, Obasanjo established a committee of experts to come up with strategies to contain an AI epidemic. The Department of Livestock, Ministry of Agriculture, convened a consultative forum of experts on AI on February 19, 2004.

3. (U) After this forum, the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Ministry of Agriculture, and other Nigerian entities began to prepare for an AI pandemic. The MOH says it has established a laboratory working group and an experts committee composed of virologists, epidemiologists, veterinary doctors, and clinicians under the MOH's coordination. Nigeria has developed its evolving AI national preparedness plan with guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The WHO is very involved in assisting Nigeria's AI preparations, according to USAID/Nigeria.

4. (U) Nigeria's Minister of State for Health, its chief epidemiologist (who is the focal point for AI in the MOH and for the Nigerian Government), and representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture could not attend the October 6-7 meeting of the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (IPAPI), in Washington, D.C. These officials, however, did attend the October AI ministerial in Ottawa, Canada, to further refine Nigeria's national plan on AI. While the MOH could not send a representative to the IPAPI meeting, Nigerian officials participated representing Nigeria's chairmanship of the African Union.

#### Third Draft of Policy Paper Sets Out the Plan -----

5. (U) The GON, led by the MOH, issued in late October 2005 the third draft of a position paper, "Global Cooperation for Pandemic Influenza Preparedness." Though this paper says coordination for combating an AI pandemic "rests squarely on the shoulders" of the MOH, the Ministry of Agriculture will also be putting together a separate plan, comprehensively detailing the animal containment strategy of AI. This committee is yet to be convened or inaugurated. It is planned that the two plans (MOH and MOA) will be integrated at a high level Ministerial Committee level which is to be chaired by the Minister of Health, but is yet to be inaugurated. According to the position paper, the GON will employ an "all-inclusive communication and community mobilization strategy involving civil society, NGOs, private sector, and leveraging the resources of multinational oil, communications conglomerates and the banks." Nigeria intends to carry out simulations and exercises in strategic locations across the country. "All relevant data will be collected, collated, and analyzed using available epidemiological and statistical software and tools."

But Significant, Wide-Ranging Difficulties Exist

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16. (SBU) According to the Position Paper, the GON plans to adopt a system for "electronic notification, e-surveillance, or e-avian flu system to provide real-time information exchange about new cases of avian influenza. Cross-border health officials will be empowered to carry out clinical examinations, and a "compulsory notification system" with neighboring countries will be established. The GON's budget for all of these activities, however, remains "to be worked out." (Comment: These monitoring and communications goals are far-fetched in a country lacking stable electric power, functioning telephone and cellular phone networks, with limited Internet connectivity. Many GON officials' offices lack telephones, fax machines, Internet access, or all of these. As for the MOH, its Web site is very basic and permits only nine ministry officials to be contacted by e-mail - and only at accounts administered by Hotmail or Yahoo rather than the GON itself. End comment.)

17. (U) The MOH correctly notes the constraints it faces in preparing for an AI pandemic: political will and the political climate, including nationwide elections in 2007; scarce financial resources and competition from priority programs such as HIV/AIDS, polio, tuberculosis, and malaria; Nigeria's "fragile" health system, including weak surveillance and notification, poor logistics and communications support to health-services delivery, and weak laboratory field support; the health sector's "poorly motivated" work force; and government officials' limited access to information technology. The MOH acknowledges Nigeria has porous borders with weak controls on the movement of goods and people.

18. (U) Nigeria established a senior Technical and Expert Committee on AI on November 14, 2005. It includes the Ministry of Agriculture, the MOH, the Poultry Association of Nigeria, the Veterinary and Medical Associations of Nigeria, the WHO, university epidemiologists, WHO, UNICEF, the Canadian International Development Agency, and USAID/Nigeria. USAID/Nigeria will suggest that the committee add the Ministry of Transport and civil-society groups from both the human-health and animal sectors. USAID already has encouraged the inclusion of Nigeria's private sector - particularly oil and gas companies.

#### AI Plan To Build on Existing Structures

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19. (SBU) Nigeria has an overall Integrated and Disease Surveillance and Response Strategy for infectious disease, but this network is patchy. The system reportedly tracks 21 priority diseases in Nigeria and was developed by the WHO, which ostensibly oversees this system through the WHO's technical leadership. The GON plan includes surveillance activities for AI at the state level. Monthly state surveillance meetings are held currently, and the MOH anticipates using these meetings to train surveillance officers on how to identify potential outbreaks of AI. The MOH will base its surveillance system for AI on the framework and strategies developed in 2003, when a suspected case of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) Nigeria's teaching hospitals and port health services were mobilized, and isolation centers and treatment facilities were established, with one quarantine center opened in Lagos and one in the country's north, in Kano.

#### Laboratories and Containment Measures Are Lacking

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10. (SBU) Nigeria has some capacity to rapidly collect, store, and transport samples of suspected animal and human cases to the country's three reference and six zonal laboratories. According to USAID Abuja, however, outside donors would have to provide the GON significant support in this area, given Nigeria's large size and extremely poor transportation infrastructure. Nigeria does not receive any donor assistance for AI, and the GON does not yet have mechanisms for receiving AI donor assistance.

11. (SBU) Nigeria is not able to quickly mobilize effective containment measures in response to outbreaks of AI among animals. Given Nigeria's very weak health system and health infrastructure, significant technical and financial support will be required. The GON has discussed reimbursing farmers whose infected animals or poultry must be destroyed, but it has not adopted such a plan and no funding is likely to be identified. The GON currently does not employ vaccination as a containment measure for animal infections. Although the GON reports it has a plan for the early procurement and stocking of Tamiflu vaccine, it is not clear what entity, whether Nigerian or foreign, would fund Tamiflu purchases.

12. The plan identifies the need to establish a legal framework as a basis for preventive and control measures. It further notes the need to enforce existing public health

laws, and international health regulations and foresees the possible invocation of quarantines and need to develop disease prevention ordinances and to add avian flu surveillance to the list of diseases covered by the national network. The Plan makes no mention of coordinating with law enforcement agencies or the military to carry out quarantine or other control measures.

#### AI Public-Education Program Not Established

13. (SBU) The GON does not have a clear strategy to educate the Nigerian public about AI, including case recognition, prevention, risk behavior, or caring for persons infected. While Nigerian national radio and television recently have carried some news reports on the implications for Africa of AI, there is a need for additional dissemination of information on AI to increase public awareness. Embassy Abuja's staff on November 8 in Abuja attended an AI lecture for the general public given by Dr. L.H. Lombin, executive director of the National Veterinary Research Institute in Vom. Lombin was clear the GON must devote substantial resources to prepare for AI.

#### Comment

14. (SBU) There is little reason to believe the GON's response to the advent of AI would be effective - largely because of the shortcomings noted by the MOH. As is the case with most GON programs, funding for Nigeria's AI effort, and the GON's ability to carry out programs, are the weak links. Should cases of AI make their way to Nigeria, the West African sub-region will be woefully ill-prepared to contain the pandemic. Because of this, significant resources - both technical and financial - would be required to make even a marginal effort to limit fatalities. Nigeria is not likely to provide these resources.

15. (SBU) Even if the GON developed a comprehensive national AI plan, it is unlikely that Nigeria would be able to mount an effective public-health response to an outbreak of AI among humans, given the country's extremely deficient health-care infrastructure, weak government, and ineffective professional bureaucracies. Nigeria has a very limited surge capacity to properly diagnose, manage, or treat patients or to protect health workers in the case of an AI pandemic. Though law enforcement and military bodies are not yet engaged in planning, in the case of an outbreak, the military would be likely to assume some kind of role in the crisis.

16. (SBU) Because of AI's high mortality rate, the effects of its arrival in Nigeria could be horrific in this country whose population may be as high as 150 million people. More than 70% of the population is under stress from extreme poverty, poor nutrition, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other endemic diseases. With Nigerian life expectancy at a mere 44 years, AI's effects in a country with barely functioning government institutions could be catastrophic. As the most populous state in Africa, and with one of the continent's weakest health infrastructures, Nigeria could, as is the case with other diseases such as malaria, polio, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis, bear the brunt of West Africa's mortality should AI make its way to this country.

17. (SBU) The U.S. Mission's most appropriate role, as led by USAID/Nigeria on this issue, will be to focus efforts on AI by taking an active role in Nigeria's Action Planning Committee; by urging the addition of key organizations, including from the private sector, to the Action Planning Committee and by facilitating the engagement of civil-society groups. The greatest assistance foreign donors could provide would be to improve Nigeria's AI preparedness, with technical assistance and funding, to mount an effective response under the technical leadership of the FAO, the WHO, and other key donors. Ultimately, however, it is the GON itself that must carry out effectively these activities.

18. (SBU) The U.S. Mission will continue to monitor the GON's progress in preparing to combat AI in Nigeria. The Embassy EAC met on November 14 to begin discussion of formulating tripwires and Mission responses. The Lagos EAC will hold a similar meeting. FUREY